GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
PANCHAYATI RAJ
LOK SABHA

STARRED QUESTION NO:290
ANSWERED ON:19.03.2008
WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES IN PANCHAYATS
Sarvey Shri Sathyanarayana

Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) Whether the Government has conducted any evaluation about the role of women representatives in the panchayats and also about the utilization of the quota reserved for them;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the measures proposed to make their participation effective?

Answer

MINISTER OF THE STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR)

(a) to (c): A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN PARTS (a), (b) & (c) OF LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION No. 290 DUE FOR REPLY ON 19.03.2008 REGARDING WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES IN PANCHAYATS.

(a) & (b): In order to gain a scientific understanding of the progress made and the challenges still to be overcome regarding the representation of women in Panchayati Raj institutions in the country, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has commissioned AC Nielsen ORG-MARG to carry out a nationwide survey on this subject under the guidance of Prof. Niraja Gopal Jayal of the Jawaharlal Nehru University and an Academic Advisory Committee comprising intellectuals, Secretary, Panchayati Raj and a representative of the National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad. The compilation of the survey findings and preparation of the report is in progress. The report is expected to be tabled in Parliament in April.

Since 1993, when the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 came into effect, 1/3rd of the seats and leadership positions at all three tiers of Panchayats have been reserved for women, in consonance with the provisions of clauses 2 and 3 of Article 243 D given below:
Article 243 D:

(2) Not less than one-third of the total number of seats reserved under clause (1) shall be reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes or, as the case may be, the Scheduled Tribes.

(3) Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat.

However, it is seen that the actual representation of women in Panchayats has progressively increased over the three rounds of elections since the 73rd Amendment came into force and often exceeds the mandatory 1/3rd proportion. According to the latest available information received from the states, the total number of elected representatives is 28,20,707 and of these 10,37,621 i.e. 36.79%, are women, as detailed in Annexe-I. Women have contested and won a significant number of unreserved seats. In Karnataka, it is seen that the percentage of women elected amongst SCs, STs and even in the general category is higher than their mandated share. Of the SC representatives elected to the Gram Panchayats, 46.2% are women and amongst the STs they are 65%. Overall, women comprise 43% of the elected representatives in this State. Some States have also mandated reservation for women in excess of the 1/3rd proportion prescribed in Article 243 D of the Constitution. For instance, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh have reserved 50% seats for women in all the three tiers of Panchayats, while Sikkim has reserved 40% of the seats. The states of Himachal Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Uttrakhand and Rajasthan have recently announced their decisions to enhance the reservation for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions to 50%.

Women representatives face both gender neutral problems faced by all Panchayat elected representatives as also special problems on account of their gender. The special problems faced by women elected representatives include: (a) lack of experience in political administration and knowledge of Panchayati Raj Act and Rules. Illiteracy compounds the problem; (b) gender prejudice from predominantly male officials and staff of PRIs as also male elected representatives, who often obstruct women from effective participation;

(c) given lingering prejudices against women in society, the greater likelihood of being treated as representatives who are proxy for

male relatives; (d) limitations in mobility and articulation, as compared to men;(e) work environment not being conducive for women with non existent Panchayat Ghars,lack of toilets and other facilities.

The Ministry is working with State Governments to ensure that in the Panchayats and Gram Sabha steps are taken to ensure the meaningful empowerment of women. These include: (1) formation of Mahila Sabhas (or equivalent) to facilitate women`s concerns and priorities being raised in meetings of Gram Sabhas and Ward Sabhas; (2) having separate quorum for women`s participation in Gram Sabhas and sub-Gram Sabhas; (3) building linkages between Panchayats and women's Self Help Groups (SHGs); (4) provision of women's component plans in the budgets of the PRIs; (5) extending the reservation cycle for women to more than one term; (6) removing the discriminatory condition of two child norm applicable in some States.

Recognizing the need for training of EWRs in order to improve their capacity for effective performance, the Ministry has extended financial support to the States for holding training programmes. As per available data from states, 89,570 women representatives of PRIs have been trained in 2004-05, 96,800 women in 2005-06 and 1,46,505 women representatives in 2006-07.

To further support the empowerment of elected women representatives, a Central Sector Plan Scheme titled Panchayat Mahila Evam Yuva Shakti Abhiyan has been launched by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj. Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyan that is one of the components of the Scheme and includes the following:

i) State level, divisional and district level sammelans of EWRs that provide a platform for the EWRs to articulate their concerns and highlight their problems. After deliberations during the Sammelan, the EWRs formulate a charter of issues to be mainstreamed into policy and advocacy support in their State so that these are addressed by the process of development in the State;

ii) training and sensitization programmes for EWRs to equip them with the knowledge and skills required for effectively discharging their functions. These training programmes would cover aspects like participatory and leadership skills, record-keeping and accounts, information about government schemes and procedures, legal rights etc;

iii) Funding of State Support Centers, to support the elected associations of EWRs which would serve as knowledge support and resource institutions.

The States of Rajasthan, Punjab, Karnataka, Uttranchal, Manipur, Goa, Sikkim, Chattisgarh, West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra (Vidarbha Region) and Bihar have already organized the State Sammelan of Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyan (PMSA). The other States are likely to hold the same in the near future. Chattisgarh and Haryana have also held District level Sammelans. States where the PMSA Sammelans have already been held will shortly commence training programmes for EWRs.